

# GENDER, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE: INVESTIGATING POTENTIAL REASONS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY AMONG THAI HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the relationship between foreign language anxiety and gender, years of study experience, and academic achievement. The utilized a mixed-method approach where 292 respondents completed a questionnaire on foreign language anxiety. The quantitative results of the questionnaire were used as a basis to form interview questions for students who volunteered to be interviewed. It was found that with the sample of the study, there was no correlation between gender and foreign language anxiety, a weak positive correlation between year of study and foreign language anxiety, and a negative correlation between academic achievement and foreign language anxiety. The interview data presented a slightly different response, though, where interviewees attributed foreign language anxiety to personality type, and the environment where English was taught.

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Language Anxiety, Anxiety, Thai students

## Introduction

Globalization and the imminent arrival of ASEAN 2015 have prompted English pedagogical and curriculum reformation which stakeholders hope will equip Thais with necessary English communication skills (Julsawad, 2013; Intathep, 2013). To date, it is still reported that Thailand lags behind other Southeast Asian nations on the English

Proficiency Index (Asia: Thailand, 2014). Several studies have suggested that the low proficiency in English competence is due to problematic policies, ill-equipped teachers, or irrelevant course materials (Foley, 2005; Segovia & Hardison, 2009). The issue may also be attributed to the students themselves. There are studies which have posited that low proficiency may stem from anxiety experienced by English language learners. In the context of Thailand, foreign language anxiety has been studied in connection with students' self-efficacy, motivational levels, and academic achievement (Sarawit, 1996; Anyadubalu, 2010). Aside from these variables, other variables have been suggested to have an effect on language anxiety, namely gender and years of experience (MacIntyre, et al. 2002).

## **Literature Review**

### **Language Anxiety and its Factors**

Language anxiety, in broad terms, may be perceived as a fear of using, or performing in a foreign language (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). This fear is an affective constraint which may be caused by a fear of communicating in a foreign language, or a fear of being evaluated by others while communicating in a foreign language. Language anxiety can also be instigated by other factors as well, such as self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors of individual language learners in unique language learning environments (Horwitz, et al., 1986).

In a study of factors of language anxiety, Trang, et al. (2013) discovered that foreign language learners and teachers reported similar reasons of language anxiety. Both samples indicated that language anxiety may be caused by learner- or teacher-related factors, external factors, or the complexity of the English language itself. Learner-related factors include gender, the ability to learn a foreign language, learning experiences, and attitudes towards learning English. On the contrary, teacher-related factors include teacher behavior and professional skills. There can also be external factors, which can be found in the learning environment. The complex nature of the English language itself may contribute to language anxiety as well. Though teachers and students in Trang, et al.'s (2013) study reported the same types of language anxiety factors, they ranked them differently in terms of how much anxiety a factor may cause. Students ranked teacher-related factors as contributing the most anxiety while teachers felt that student-related factors contributed to a greater degree of anxiety.

In line with Trang, et al.'s (2013) study, Kim (2009) and Koul, et al. (2009) also discovered that external factors such as the school environment may contribute to a heightened level of anxiety. Furthermore, educational institutions which assess learning progress by means of formal evaluation may cause learners to feel anxious about their language production, especially those studying a foreign language. In some learning environments, students become highly anxious because they are expected to achieve native-like fluency and accuracy, as reported by Hashemi (2011). Anxiety does not only affect students in a real classroom setting, but affects those who are learning a foreign language via distance mode as well (Hurd, 2007).

### **Gender, Year of Study and Anxiety**

Research studying the link between anxiety and gender, academic achievement, and years of study in the Thai context has been minimal. Past studies conducted in the Thai context have sought to understand the link between language anxiety and academic achievement (Sarawit, 1996; Anyadubalu, 2010). These studies have found that students who experience lower levels of anxiety generally perform better. Anyadubalu (2010) found that confounding variables, though, such as teachers' teaching styles and years of experience of learning English do not affect students' anxiety level. However, both Anyadubalu (2010) and Sarawit (1996) did not address the issue of gender. Furthermore, literature seemed to have suggested that prior experience in language learning may actually affect levels of language learning anxiety (Trang, et al., 2013).

Gender has been cited as a contributing factor for differences in language learning anxiety. In a study by *Öztürk and Gürbüz* (2013), it was found that female students had a moderate level of anxiety whereas male students had a lower level of anxiety. *Öztürk and Gürbüz* (2013) also stated that female students found speaking activities the most anxiety-provoking in a language learning environment. Park and French (2013) found similar results, in that female subjects reported a higher level of language anxiety. Park and French (2013) attributed the higher levels of language anxiety among females to socio-cultural factors. Female learners may be more prone to language anxiety if they come from a male-dominated society. In such cases, females are expected to take on a submissive role and in turn, find learning situations which require them to express personal thoughts highly stressful. Despite female students being highly anxious, they are quite motivated (MacIntyre, et al. 2002).

In terms of years of experience, or age, it has been suggested that language learners are less anxious and more willing to communicate as they progress in school and in age. This, however, depends on a few variables, such as experience in using the target language, as well as gender. MacIntyre, et al. (2002) reported that while male learners seem to have similar levels of language anxiety across different grades, female learners gradually become more willing and less anxious as they mature and gain more classroom experiences as they advance in grade level. This result needs to be treated cautiously, though, as MacIntyre, et al.'s study was conducted in an environment different from the current research setting. In terms of specific skills Ekstrom (2013) found that in terms of age, the anxiety level for speaking in the target language persists even after students have gained experiences and progressed through school. This is different for other language skills, though, where 2<sup>nd</sup> year upper secondary students experienced more anxiety in writing and listening, while 1<sup>st</sup> year upper secondary school students were more anxious when it came to reading. Older students, however, did not seem to be anxious with writing.

### **Effects of Language Anxiety**

The presence of language anxiety among language learners has been shown to have detrimental effects on the learner. First, a high level of language anxiety restricts the type of language learning strategies available to students, as seen in Khamkhien's (2011) study where anxious language learners relied mostly on memory-based strategies as opposed to social strategies where learners deliberately create social situations where they are compelled to use the target language. This is echoed in Rao's study (2006) where Chinese students were also found to prefer memory-based strategies. Memory-based strategies are common among anxious language learners who have lower levels of language proficiency (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012). Roa (2006) explains that this may be due to the local culture's preference for rote learning. Another effect of language anxiety is the low levels of self-efficacy and motivation in the classroom (Anyadubalu, 2010), which limits the students' repertoire of language learning strategies.

In terms of classroom performance, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) suggest that language anxiety affects academic performance, particularly in the second language classroom. They indicated that language anxiety has a negative correlation with course grades and standardized achievement tests. The results concur with Ganschow, et al.'s (1994) study, where students with higher levels of anxiety scored poorly in tests administered in both the

students' first language and target language. Language anxiety has also been found to affect content-type courses, where the medium of instruction is not in the students' first language, as well as in language-skills courses (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). Consequently, language learners may be discouraged to pursue higher-level foreign language courses (Phillips, 1992). Finally, language anxiety affects students' level of participation in class. Liu and Jackson (2008) and Kitano (2001) revealed that students who have higher levels of language anxiety may be more unwilling to speak up in class, despite having a positive disposition towards learning the target language. However, detrimental effects may not necessarily be a general trend among anxious students. Females and more anxious students have been found to have better achievement in their language classes compared to males and less anxious students (Park & French, 2013).

While there have been foreign language anxiety studies conducted on Thai learners (Sarawit, 1996; Anyadubalu, 2010), the study of language anxiety can never be exhaustive as it is an affective attribute unique to language learners in their own learning progress (Liu & Zhang, 2013). Furthermore, studies have indicated that foreign language anxiety is a situation specific construct which may differ in different learning environments (Cha, et al., 2011; Liu & Huang, 2011). Thus an investigation done with different samples could perhaps provide a fuller picture of Thai language learners' affective disposition towards foreign language learning. Since previous studies in Thailand have disregarded the issue of gender and years of experience, these variables will be the foci of this study, as well as student's academic achievement (GPA). Finally, since studies on language anxiety conducted in Thailand have been quantitative in nature, this study aims to further explore the construct of language anxiety through a mixed method approach by including a qualitative aspect to the research paradigm. It is hoped that allowing subjectivity in the research paradigm would complement the subjective nature of anxiety.

The specific research questions of this study are:

1. What is the correlation between foreign language anxiety and gender?
2. What is the correlation between foreign language anxiety and year of study?
3. What is the correlation between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement?

## Sample and Methodology

This study seeks to explore the relationship between anxiety and gender, year of study, and academic achievement, or GPA. Findings from the correlative analysis will then be used as the basis to formulate semi-structured interview questions.

The participants were approached at two English camps jointly organized by Kaeng Khoi High School and Asia-Pacific International University. At the end of the first English camp, the participants were invited to complete a questionnaire, which consist of demographic questions as well as 25 items concerning anxiety that can be rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Correlations were also calculated to determine any significant relationships between genders, years of study, and GPA with foreign language anxiety. At the end of the questionnaire, students who were willing could participate in an interview at the end of the second English camp, which was a couple of weeks after the first camp. The semi-structured interview questions revolved around the quantitative findings of the questionnaire.

The FLCAS, developed by Horwitz, et al. (1986), seeks to measure the overall number of participants who experience any of the three types of anxiety pertinent to language learning, namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The questionnaire items are categorized, as shown in Table I below. Since the introduction of this survey tool, many researchers have used and modified FLCAS in different learning environments, such as Liu and Zhang (2013) in China, Awan, et al. (2010) in Pakistan, and Marcos-Llinàs and Juan-Garau (2009) in the United States of America. The continued use of FLCAS suggests that it is a reliable tool to measure language anxiety (Trang, 2012). For the context of this study, the number of questions from the original FLCAS was reduced from 33 to 25 (see the Appendix for the list of questions that were included). The purpose of this reduction was to make the questionnaire more concise. The researchers read through all the questions and eliminated those which were considered redundant or inapplicable. The adjusted questionnaire items were then determined for their reliability coefficient and a Cronbach's Alpha value of .79 at an alpha level of .05, was achieved, which according to George and Mallery (2003), can be claimed to have a high degree of reliability.

Table I: Questionnaire Items Measuring English Language Learning Anxiety

Language Anxiety Type	Items on Questionnaire	Total Number of Items
Communication apprehension	1, 5, 8, 10, 12(p), 13, 14, 15, 16(p), 21, 22, 23, 24	13
Fear of Negative Evaluation	2(p), 3, 4(p), 6, 11, 17, 19(p), 20, 25	9
Test Anxiety	7(p), 9, 18	3

(p) = positive statement

The questionnaire consists of two parts. In Part I, the respondents were asked to indicate their demographic profile such as gender, year level, age, and GPA. In Part II, respondents were required to complete twenty five closed-ended questionnaire items aimed at measuring students' English language learning anxiety. These items were rated on a scale of 1-5, ranging from strongly disagree (SD) to strongly agree (SA). The questionnaire was prepared bilingually, in English and Thai, to ensure that the participants would be able to understand the statements. The translated version was thoroughly checked for accuracy to ensure that all items met the intended meaning.

Results

The 292 respondents were 83 male and 209 female students aged between 12 – 19 years. They were in different years of study ranging from Mathayom 2 (Grade 8) to Mathayom 6 (Grade 12). Figure A below illustrates the percentage of respondents according to their year level while Figure B shows age group of the sample.

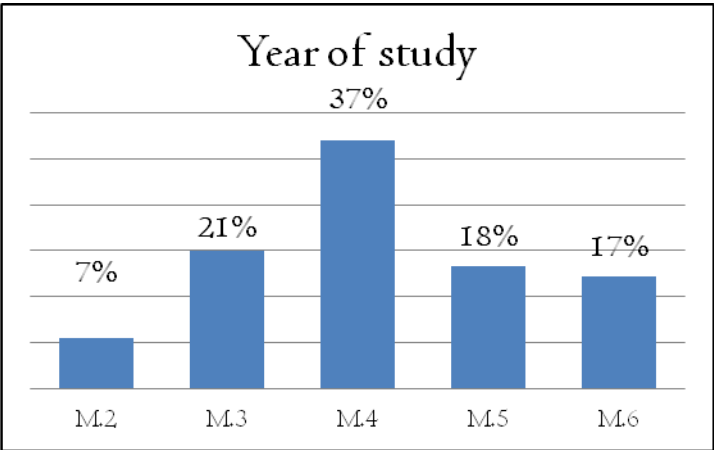


Figure A. Percentage of respondents in each class level

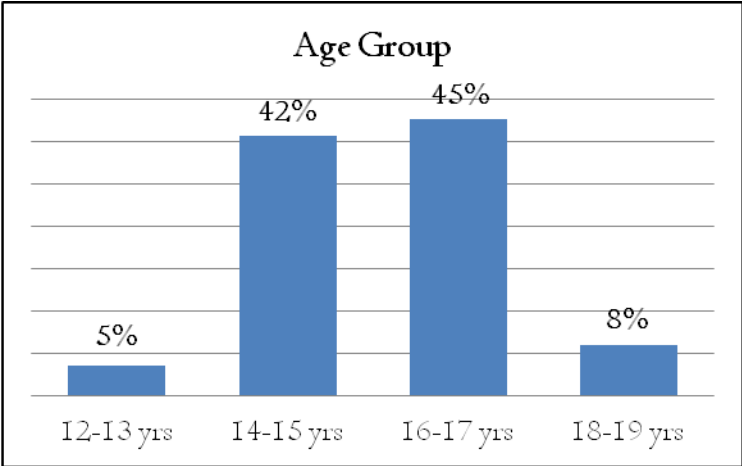


Figure B. Percentage of respondents in age group

Table 2: Correlation between Gender and Foreign Language Anxiety

		Overall Anxiety Level	Test Anxiety	Communication Apprehension	Fear of Negative Evaluation
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-0.48	.022	-.085	0.13
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.410	.712	.147	.829

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3: Correlation between Year of Study and Foreign Language Anxiety

		Overall Anxiety Level	Test Anxiety	Communication Apprehension	Fear of Negative Evaluation
Year of Study	Pearson Correlation	.089	.031	.166**	-.071
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.129	.592	.005	.224

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)



Table 4: Correlation between students' academic achievement (GPA) and Foreign Language Anxiety

		Overall Anxiety Level	Test Anxiety	Communication Apprehension	Fear of Negative Evaluation
GPA	Pearson Correlation	-.120*	-.049	-.221**	.088
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045	.414	.000	.141

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

It appears that the sample of this study does experience language anxiety which includes test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. The first research question asked whether there was any relationship between foreign language anxiety and gender. From Table 2, results indicated that there is no significant relationship between the two variables. This finding presents a contrasting result to those reported by (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013; Park & French, 2013). The second research question asked for the correlative relationship between year of study and foreign language anxiety. It appears that year of study is positively correlated with communication apprehension, albeit weakly (Table 3). In this context, though, students could have experienced a higher level of anxiousness due to the nature of the context where the data was collected. Data for this study was collected at two separate English camps organized for students to participate in communicative activities. These communicative activities, which require students to speak and interact, may occur infrequently in the students' own classrooms.

The third research question aimed to determine the correlation between GPA and foreign language anxiety (Table 4). It appears that students' GPA has a negative correlation with overall anxiety level. This is also true for GPA and communication apprehension. It can be assumed from these findings that students with better GPAs have lower levels of anxiety.

To further inform the quantitative results, a semi-structured interview was conducted. The interview questions sought to glean the students' opinions regarding language learning anxiety and its relation with gender, years of experience, and GPA. The following broad, open-ended questions were asked: (1) What is the relationship between language anxiety and gender? (2) What is the relationship between language anxiety and years of

experience? and (3) What is the relationship between language anxiety and GPA? Follow-up questions were also used to encourage students to elaborate more on their opinions. Only eleven students, five males and six females, agreed to be interviewed. All the respondents came from Mathayom 6. All the interviewees' identities were kept anonymous. The interview was conducted in the students' first language, Thai and was back-translated to ensure reliability of meaning.

The interview began with the interviewer inviting the students to describe their English classroom. Since students came from the same school and were at the same grade level, their descriptions of the English language classrooms were generally similar. Several themes which emerged include the use of students' first language and a focus on the teaching of language structure.

*Our teachers used our first language to make sure that we understand the lesson (Student 4)*

*The teacher doesn't care that students speak in their first language. We do speak English, but not a lot, and not frequently (Student 7)*

*The teacher focuses primarily on the study of grammar, like "what is a verb, that is a verb, this is a verb, if this is a verb, you should use it this way", but this information is written to us in English, but explained to us in our first language (Student 10)*

*The English teachers teach based on the objectives of the textbook, and the objectives are all about grammar, the rules and all, and the teacher will explain these in Thai (Student 2)*

Perhaps what Student 10 shared alludes to what Student 4 said

*In terms of communicating in English, students lag because we do not have the chance to speak in English*

Since it appears that English is used minimally in the English language classroom, one would not find it difficult to believe that the outlook towards the English learning environment and their teachers is quite negative. A statement made by Student 11 resonates with the quantitative results (Table

4) which indicated that students are anxious because of a fear towards negative evaluation

*We do try to speak in English. The school organizes an English speaking day once a week, but not many of us actually speak in English (Student 1)*

*Sometimes we have some speaking activities in English, but we are not afraid to use Thai for these activities because the teacher never minded (Student 8)*

*The students are worried to speak in English, maybe because of our weak understanding of English rules, and students who are weaker in English are afraid to speak out for fear of being teased, but even those who have a good command of English are sometimes shy to speak up because they don't want their friends to think that they are showing off (Student 11)*

*The environment where I learned English was never conducive for us to use English. I never felt like I had to use English communicatively because the teachers themselves never used English to teach us. The class was also not interesting, but this really depends on the teacher is. Some of my English teachers admitted that they don't know how to use English. So, the quality of teachers who taught us are not so great. This didn't help us with being motivated at all (Student 2)*

*We don't receive good feedback, sometimes we don't know what to do with the feedback that we receive, and sometimes I am surprised that I get good marks for an assignment that I didn't really put much effort into (Student 7)*

*There was a teacher who never spoke or taught in English at all (Student 1)*

As described earlier, the student population at the research site was mostly female students. With regards to which gender appeared to be more comfortable and less anxious to contribute, interviewees had different observations.

*I think there both genders tried their best and contributed equally in class, when an opportunity came up (Student 10)*

*There is equal contribution from both genders; I feel that boys and girls contribute the same (Student 6)*

Despite these, at least one student thought that there were times when the male students contributed more, and when the female students contributed more

*There were certain years when the boys were more comfortable and confident with their English. I think it was because of the encouragement given through support and facilities that teachers and the school provided. This made the students more active, but the year after that, girls became more comfortable and confident (Student 11)*

Some students also felt that it was not really gender that affected how anxious a student is towards language use. Instead, anxiety may be a personality trait.

*I think the equal contribution among the boys and girls is because of personality, not gender; I think gender doesn't have anything to do with how good they are in English; I think it's personality because some of them may be more hardworking and braver to use English (Student 3)*

*I agree that it depends on the personality of the student (Student 5)*

In terms of the relationship between years of experience and foreign language anxiety, students mentioned that anxiety does not decrease as they become more accustomed to the English language. One reason cited by several students is the different approach employed by different teachers. This finding is different from that reported by Anyadubalu (2010), which suggested that teachers' teaching styles and years of experience of learning English do not affect students' anxiety level

*Every year when we progress through school, we have a new English teacher who comes in with a different teaching approach, and every year it takes some time for us to get*

*adjusted with the new teaching approach. Building rapport and getting used to the approach take time and this sometimes causes me to feel tired (Student 9)*

*What stresses me out in the English class is really the approach, not of what I know or don't know in English (Student 10)*

Finally, when asked if their overall results had an effect on their level of anxiety, students could not directly say that there was.

*I think my level of proficiency was not affected by my overall results, I think being interested is more important (Student 4)*

*I could pass the rest of my subjects because they were just testing the information that I knew, and I don't think just because I'm good in English, or good in other subjects, and have a good overall results, it doesn't help me do any better in English, or any other subjects (Student 5)*

Student 4 believes that being interested can be a useful attitude to improve grades, or perhaps improve one's level of language proficiency. Perhaps what can be observed here is student relying on motivation or learning strategies to manage their learning. This can be seen in Student 9's statement as well

*Sometimes I feel encouraged to learn English because sometimes when I hear my friends use English, I feel like I want to be like them*

With regards to whether or not gender, years of experience, and GPA had any relations to foreign language anxiety, students' responses from the interview indicated that the relationship may not be clear cut. What we can see from the interview data though is the lack of a positive English language learning environment. Students cited the constant use of Thai, the lack of learning objectives, and lack of quality feedback, and the variety of pedagogical approach as being challenges faced in their English classes. Despite the English lessons prepared for these students may be somewhat flawed, students have realized that they may rely on external stimuli such as motivation and social strategies as means to learn English.

## Discussion

### Language Learning in a Collectivist Society

Some aspects of the qualitative data paralleled what was discovered quantitatively, but uncovered other issues as well. These issues include the perception towards teachers, the learning goals of a Thai English classroom, and potential benefits of student agency. In a collectivist society, there is an unspoken respect for authority and a need to maintain group harmony (Samovar, et al., 2013). From the data, we could see these traits through the way students have become desensitized in the way that they learn English, even if they do not necessarily agree or enjoy with the teaching and learning approach. This perhaps stems from the value placed on respect towards educators. In Thai classes, it is very common to find a teacher steering the direction of the learning process, and his or her actions are not questionable. Positioning a teacher as an authoritative figure in a classroom where there is minimal dialogue with students' confines lessons to become very rigid. Perhaps this is the reason why it is easy to view language as a discrete system in societies that are primarily collectivist (Loo, 2012). English classes in Thailand are more prone to focus on language forms, that is, the learning of chunks of grammar or isolated vocabulary, without a concern for communicative context (Foley, 2005; Segovia & Hardison, 2009). This is not only a concern for Thai English classes, but also for other English classes within the Southeast Asian context (Loo, 2012). When students are lacking in motivation and interest in learning, these students may find higher-level foreign language courses redundant or unnecessary, as suggested by Phillips (1992).

As mentioned, collectivist societies also places a high value on 'face', or social impression. This may be a reason for students to opt to remain silent and docile (Cheng & Erben, 2012). Foley (2005) elaborates this as students making a conscious choice to avoid any form of confrontation and competition with their peers in the classroom, as seen in the response of a few students in the interview. Hence, language learners within this cultural context are faced with the challenge of maintaining an acceptable relationship with their teachers, who are considered the figures of authority in the classroom (Littlewood, 2001), as well as with their peers, and would provoke anxiety if there is a divergence from the accepted norm. When deliberately choosing to remain quiet, this may reinforce the common perception that Asian students are passive. Of course, this has been argued to be a detrimental stereotype and is not a general case for many Asian language learners (Littlewood, 2001).

### Misrepresentation of Language Proficiency

We have seen how students' English classrooms focus on the learning of grammar. This corroborates with what Foley (2005) deems the common local approach for language teaching, in which students are evaluated based on how well they know the English grammar system. This may build a false conception of students' language proficiency. English language learners may equate their knowledge of grammar to their ability to communicate in the target language. This misperception may contribute to higher levels of anxiety, especially for language learners who are concerned with high-stakes assessment, as shown in Koul, et al.'s (2009) study, where learners who are more performance-goal oriented tend to be more anxious. Furthermore, from this study, it seems that many students may have an ungrounded notion that other people, including their classmates, may have a better command of English. However, if English classes in Thailand are really uncommunicative, it would be hard for the participants to gauge how well their peers communicate in English. This misguided notion may push students even further to not participate at all (Kitano, 2001).

The results of this study corroborated Cha, et al.'s (2011) study whereby young adult learners, as with older learners, experience foreign language anxiety. It is crucial to note, though, that experiencing anxiousness is a natural phenomenon for everyone – it is an integral part of the learning process. For language learners from of all ages, language anxiety can actually be manipulated and transformed into a motivational factor which may have positive outcomes (Woordrow, 2011). Papi (2010) pointed out that language learners who experience a high level of anxiousness do not necessarily fail in their language courses. This is true for those who channel their anxiety into higher levels of effort to succeed in their studies (also discussed by Horwitz, et al., 1986 and Price, 1991). Just because students experience anxiety does not mean that they have less motivation to learn (Kim, 2009). Language educators can strategize their teaching approaches to enhance students' intrinsic motivation, or mastery goals, instead of performance goals which are concerned with assessment and evaluation. When students appreciate learning on an intrinsic and personal level, they will find language learning more enjoyable (Kim, 2009). As observed in the interview data, some students are aware that they may rely on positive attitudes, or their immediate social context for help in learning English.

Teachers can also help learners identify points when anxiety is the most apparent. With this knowledge, students may be able to formulate strategies and be self-efficacious in handling their learning as well as their anxiety

(Woodrow, 2011). Furthermore, teachers should keep an open mind when dealing with students. Students who appear passive are not necessarily experiencing anxiety, and there are students who do not consider passivity as a negative learning trait. Participants in Tran's (2013) study reported that just because they remain quiet in class does not mean they are not participating. These participants claim that they can communicate through other non-spoken means.

## **Limitations**

This study was able to explore the correlative links between language anxiety with gender, years of study, and academic achievement. Though results seem to differ from those that studied similar variables, this may be due to the context of the study, and perhaps the design of this research. Qualitative data, though it confirmed some of the quantitative results, showed an even more diverse perception towards foreign language anxiety.

## **Conclusion**

This study reiterates the value of studying affective constructs of language learners (Liu & Zhang, 2013). This study has actually raised some contrasting issues which may be worth pursuing, plus this study further confirms that foreign language anxiety is a situation specific construct which may differ in different learning environments (Cha, et al., 2011; Liu & Huang, 2011). Several assumptions can be made based on the results of this study. First, English classrooms of these participants may not be conducive for communicative lessons. Second, the learning of English still utilizes a discrete approach, thus reducing the opportunities for communicative activities. Third, there may be a growing misconception among the participants that proficiency in English is determined based on tests. These assumptions are similar concerns raised by Foley (2005) and Segovia and Hardison (2009). Nevertheless, the situation is not at all dire. Teachers can tap into students' desire to learn. When reflecting upon the interview data, schools could perhaps consider developing a core group of English teachers with a certain pedagogical approach to ensure that students learn English consistently. Having a core group of English teachers may also encourage the initiation of a critical community of practice.

Assuming that users of English around Thailand are preparing to welcome their ASEAN counterparts in 2015, language educators can motivate their students by emphasizing individual accomplishments and an openness to understand others' cultures (Koul, et al., 2009), instead of orienting them towards a performance-based motivation where exams become



a priority. Perhaps this move will lessen anxiety, and enrich the learning experience in a more positive manner.

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